

Spiritual Dimensions of Indian Culture

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Received: 11 December 2013 Accepted: 5 January 2014 Published: 15 January 2014

Abstract

Civilization and Culture are hall-mark of the collective life of man. Civilization signifies the moral evolved state of the society, which embraces activity of mental life, including arts and learning. According to Sri Aurobindo civilization is harmony of spirit¹ Culture is the discipline by which man's moral and intellectual nature is elevated. According to Sri Aurobindo, culture comprises various activities of the cultivated aesthetic being, mind and body- the harmony of the inner and outer man. Will Durant has defined civilization, in his monumental work 'The Story of Civilization, to mean social organization, moral order and cultural activity. Four elements constitute civilization: Economic provision, political organization moral traditions, and pursuit of knowledge and arts. In a nut-shell we may comprehend civilization of people as an advance stage of its social development. ² Spirit is the non- material, animating and immortal part of man. According to Sri Aurobindo, Spirit is the self -existence being, with infinite power of consciousness and unconditional delight. Will Durant has defined culture as the sum-total of a people's institutions, customs and arts. The UNESCO- sponsored book 'Traditional Cultures of South East Asia' gives the definition of Culture thus: Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, benefits, sentiments, values and social forms which are passed on from one generation to another in any given society. 'In short, Culture signifies refinement of minds and manners as also cultivation of aesthetic faculties in a particular society.

Index terms— information security, human behaviour, personality type, profiling, social, technological, insider threat.

1 Introduction

Civilization and Culture are hall-mark of the collective life of man. Civilization signifies the moral evolved state of the society, which embraces activity of mental life, including arts and learning. According to Sri Aurobindo civilization is harmony of spirit ¹ Culture is the discipline by which man's moral and intellectual nature is elevated. According to Sri Aurobindo, culture comprises various activities of the cultivated aesthetic being, mind and body- the harmony of the inner and outer man. Will Durant has defined civilization, in his monumental work 'The Story of Civilization, to mean social organization, moral order and cultural activity. Four elements constitute civilization: Economic provision, political organization moral traditions, and pursuit of knowledge and arts. In a nut-shell we may comprehend civilization of people as an advance stage of its social development.

² Spirit is the non-material, animating and immortal part of man. According to Sri Aurobindo, Spirit is the self -existence being, with infinite power of consciousness and unconditional delight. Will Durant has defined culture as the sum-total of a people's institutions, customs and arts. The UNESCO-sponsored book 'Traditional Cultures of South East Asia' gives the definition of Culture thus: Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, benefits, sentiments, values and social forms which are passed on from one generation to another in any given society. 'In short, Culture signifies refinement of minds and manners as also cultivation of aesthetic faculties in a particular society.

45 Author: Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Serampore College, West Bengal, India. e-mail:
46 sribasgoswami@rediffmail.com . All contacts with the Spirit or Self, the Higher Consciousness and Divine are
47 termed as 'spiritual: For man to become divine in consciousness, and to act and live inwardly and outwardly the
48 Divine Life, is meant what is meant by Spirituality. As explained by Sri Aurobindo. Elsewhere he has further
49 defined Spirituality as "the attempt to 1 See The Foundation of Indian Culture. 2 Ideal of Human Unity 3 Essays
50 on Gita know and live in the highest self, the divine, the allembracing unity, and to raise life in all its parts to
51 the divinest possible values."

52 Indian culture is a continuing culture -a living factor -in the life of nearly one-seventh of the human race ,
53 unlike the ancient cultures, e.g. Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, roman and former Chinese, which are now of the
54 historical value only. As Swami Ranganathananda has said in his enlightening tone 'Eternal Values of a changing
55 Society' (Vol. I) "how the Indian culture arose nearly five thousand years ago, how it developed and was come
56 down to us as a rich human legacy, is a very fascinating and rewarding study."

57 We get a glimpse of the initial stage of Indian culture-of both of its aspects. Viz. material and mentalin Rig-
58 Veda, which is the first written record of mankind. Historians tell us that Indians of the Vedic age, also called
59 Indo-Aryans, were an energetic race of people. On the material front they exhibited love of life and indulged
60 freely in poetry and war. On the mental plane they were deeply spiritual and were adepts in bold philosophical
61 speculation. Spirituality was during those times the essence of Indian culture. The Vedic Rishi excelled in
62 devising mystic and metaphysical disciplines for realizing the immortal and divine self of man, "of which life and
63 death are but shadows"-the Rig Veda (X-121-2) says. In this context Sri Aurobindo has said thus: "The Veda was
64 to these early seers the World discovering the Truth and clothing in image and symbol the mystic significance of
65 life. It was a divine discovery and unveiling of the potencies of the world, of its mysterious revealing and creative
66 capacity, not the word of the logical and reasoning or the aesthetic intelligence, but the intuitive and inspired
67 rhythmic utterance, the 'mantra. 4 The Vedic Rishi held the view that the universe is dynamic-not -static-and is
68 susceptible of an incessant evolutionary process. They discovered that in spite of all speculative knowledge the
69 universe remained a mystery and that the mystery deepened with the advance of knowledge. They were endowed
70 with a deep " The guiding principle of the spiritual pursuit of the Vedic Indians was: "known thy soul"-that
71 found expression and exemplification in the variegated forms of the Vedic lore, viz. the Upanishads, Brahman
72 treatises , Aranyakas, Karakas, Dharshans, Sutras and Smritis. The Indo -Aryans envied an optimistic view of
73 life. There is no touch of pessimism in the Vedic lore. passion for truth, ananda and welfare of all beings. "The
74 entire world is but one family" and "Devotion to the welfare of all beings"-were their watch-words.

75 In the Upanishads we find scientific pursuit of the truth of life and the reality of the Absolute One manifested
76 as cosmos, in the depth of experience of the Rishi. As Sri Aurobindo has said: "the highest authority they could
77 give for their own sublime utterances was a supporting citation from their predecessors with the formula-tad
78 esa rca-bhykta'-"this is that word which was spoken by the Rig-Veda." About the Upanishads Sri Aurobindo
79 has further said+ "they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiencesdocuments of revelatory and intuitive
80 philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness 5 The revelatory gnosis of the Veda culminates in
81 'Vedanta', which term literally means 'end of the Veda' or the essence of all-knowledge. Sri Aurobindo has
82 stated in 'The foundation of Indian culture' that the Upanishads are Vedanta. The Vedanta philosophy '. All
83 subsequent development of Indian culture was conditioned by this Upnishadic legacy. Says Sri Aurobindo against:
84 "Buddhism with all its developments was only a restatement, although from a new standpoint and with fresh
85 terms of intellectual definition and reasoning? and Sufism (in Islam) 6 only repeats them (i.e. the Upanishadic
86 revelation and philosophical) in another language."

87 Coming in the wake of Upanishads, the Bhagwad Gita is the first successful attempt in man's cultural history
88 to work out a complete philosophy of life. It contains in its fold a unique synthesis also, of the triune Yoga of
89 knowledge. Action and Devotion-Jnan, Karma and Bhakti. A contemporary work of Vedanta in the Upanishadic
90 strain is the Ashtavakra Samhita (also called Ashtavakra Gita') which is a veritable guide for realization of the
91 Self.

92 Simultaneously the supreme technique of meditation and other Yoga systems, fortified by moral purity and
93 intense aspiration for transformation of consciousness, provided a spiritual base of the future of Indian culture.
94 Even the practice of arts of spiritually oriented. Music had its origin in the lyrical hymns of Sam-Veda and a
95 glaring example of the arts was of spiritual dance is 'Shiva -tandava,' the dance of creation by the Lord of 'tapas',
96 who has been depicted as 'Nataraj' (the deity of the art of dancing) in Indian mythology. As aptly narrated
97 by Swami Ranganathananda (in 'Eternal Values of a Changing Society'): "The image of God as Nataraj, the
98 king of dancers, teaches us that the world is the product of the joyous dance of the supreme Deity". 5 The
99 foundation of Indian Culture(Centenary Vol. 14) PP-261-267, 269-270 depicts Brahman, the ultimate Reality
100 as 'Sat-Chit-Ananda', i.e. Existence consciousness-Bliss. As described in the Taittiriya Upanishad (II-7), "He is
101 very delighted. By achieving this delight man verily becomes blissful. Who indeed would breathe, who would
102 live, if in the space (of the heart) this bliss were not there? Indeed it is He alone that is the source of bliss."

103 The Mundaka Upanishad (II (ii)-8) describes the world as blissful and immortal. The Isha Upanishad describes
104 God as 'kavi' (i.e. Devine Poet seer) and indicates that the universe is his poem, emanating in waves and
105 rhythms. In this context Sri Aurobindo has further said: "The Vedas and the Upanishads are not only the
106 sufficient fountain head of Indian philosophy and religion, but of all Indian art, poetry and literature. -The Veda

107 is thus the spiritual and psychological seed of Indian culture and the Upanishads and expression of the truth of
108 highest spiritual knowledge and experience that has always been the supreme idea of that culture."

109 In the post-Vedic era, Indian culture developed zest in life which expressed itself remarkably in the fine arts,
110 literature, music and dance. Philosophy became experimental, instead of being speculative. Spirituality got
111 diluted with ritualistic priestcraft, but still it retained its superb luster as the Indian way of higher life, for the
112 priesthood laid emphasis on 'Tapasya, i.e. austerities and askesis. The great epics -Ramayana of Valmiki and
113 Mahabharata of Vyas-the poetic 'itihasas' (i.e. ancient historical or legendary epics)were created in that era.

114 The para-yogic system of tantra was in vogue during this post-Vedic era. The method of the Tantra discipline
115 is in words of Sri Aurobindo, "to raise Nature in man into manifest power of spirit." Also, the cult of Shakti
116 worship prevailed throughout the land. 'Shakti for the commonality of the energies of Nature-physical, biological,
117 mental and spiritual. The whole creation conscious and unconscious entities has emanated from the Energy of
118 Consciousness-' Chit Shakti ', Shakti has been and still is, worshipped with various names of Divine Mother, viz.
119 Kali, Chandī, Durga, Devil it al.

120 In the Puranic era (about five centuries B.C. and the posterior period) when various were created, the spiritual
121 content of Indian culture received the first major jolt, for the spiritual values got distorted among the masses
122 into pries ridden ritualism and superstition. At this chaotic stage two prophets appeared in the arena of Indian
123 spiritual culture-Mahavira (in the middle of the sixth century B.C.) And Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.).
124 Mahavira revived the ancient Jainism and organized a celibate clergy and an order of nuns. Buddha founded
125 a new religion known as Buddhism about which Sri Aurobindo says that "in its dynamic parts, by its ethical
126 system and spiritual method, it gave a new set of values, a server vigor yet a gentler idealism of human living
127 and was therefore powerfully creative both in arts which interpret life and in society and politics." The doctrines
128 of Jainism are similar to those of hermitage abounded galore, where the torch of Vedic wisdom and gnosis
129 continued to kindle un-flickered. Also, stalwarts like Shankara, Ramanuja and Mahavira appeared to the Indian
130 soil who held the banner of the Vedanta philosophy aloft. They highlighted the spiritual content of Indian culture.
131 Sankaracharya has described the universe as "Waves of beauty"-in the strain of Upanishads. In his poetic work
132 'Vivekchudamani' there is an intellectual echo of the voice of the Upanishads and the manner of the Gita", each
133 in his own way of Monism and Dualism (Advaita, Vishisht Advaita and Dvaita) respectively as averred by Sri
134 Aurobindo.

135 In the medieval ages, Sanskrit became* "the language of pundits and expect for certain philosophical, religious
136 and learned purposes no longer a first-hand expression of the life and mind of people." The diversified version
137 of the Ramayana-by Krittibas in Bengali and Kamban in Tamil,-Bhavartha Ram ayana in Marathi, Ranganatha
138 Ramayana in Telegu, Adhyatma Rama-yanam in Malyalam, Rama charita Puranam in Kannada emphasized the
139 need of disciplined life in a cultured society. The cult of devotion-Bhakti Margaprevalled in India widely among
140 the high and low. The Maharastrian saints Ramdas and Tukaram, the Tamil saint Tiruvalluvar and poetess
141 Avvai gave a fillip to the moral and ethical upliftment of the masses in their respective regions. In Bengal the
142 divine genius of Chaitanya and inspired verses of the two poets, Bidyapati and Chandidas, brought about a
143 new awakening. In northern India the poet-saints Tulsi Das, Sur Das, Mira Bai, Nanak and Kabir gave a new
144 dimension to the religious aspects of Indian culture. Also, there was a horde of Muslim Sufi-saints, the chief
145 among them being Khwaja Muinud deen Chishti of Ajmer, who gave impetus, in their own way, to the spiritual
146 fervor among the masses.

147 In modern times, the surge of spirituality has undulated to its lowest ebb throughout the world owing to the
148 rising tide of physical sciences, and in India due to the influx of the materialistic Western civilization also. Thus
149 says Sri Aurobindo7. "Indian society is in a still more chaotic stage; for the old forms are crumbling away under
150 the pressure of the environment, their spirit and reality are more and more passing out of them, but façade
151 persists by the force of inertia of thought and will and the remaining attachment of a long association, while
152 the new powerless to be born". However, the fluctuating torch of Vedic enlightenment has been reilluminated with
153 multi-faceted brilliance by great men of divine dispensation, viz. Sri Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Swami
154 Dayananda and Sri Aurobindo. Among this godlike personage Sri Aurobindo stands supreme, like the Everest
155 peak of the Himalayas. The uniqueness of his supernal mission is that it relates to a new dimension of spirituality,
156 not only of Indian culture but of entire mankind, viz. the advent of new species of Supermen and Sacramental
157 Beings, next higher to human race.

158 As regards to various reformist movements in modern times Sri Aurobindo says. 6 The real import of a culture
159 is revealed by the orientation it gives to the way of life and the types of men it moulds by its manifold creative
160 facets. The essence of the spiritual dimensions of Indian culture is Wisdom, Vijnana. To gain Wisdom through
161 the science of self-'Amta-Bodha' or 'para -Vidya'-is its first tenet Realization of one's immortal divine self or
162 infinite existence, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss-SAT-CHIT-ANANDA-is the second tenet. The third is
163 that religion is a matter of experience and not a dogma or creed. Eternal and universal Truth ('Rtam' in the
164 terminology of the Veda) is another dimension of Indian culture. Sri Aurobindo has described in beautiful words
165 how is the days of your India, through the vision of Vedic Rishis, saw that "the invisible always surrounds the
166 visible, the supra-sensible the sensible, even as infinity always surrounds the finite. She saw too that man has
167 "All Great movements of life in India have been with a new spiritual thought and usually a new religious activity.
168 What more striking and significant fact can there be than this that even the new European influence, which
169 was an influence intellectual, rationalistic, so often anti-religious and which drew so much of its idealism from

2 "THOUGH WHATEVER PATHS MEN COME TO ME, I RECEIVE THEM THROUGH THOSE VERY PATHS. ALL PATHS, O ARJUN, EVENTUALLY COME TO ME ONLY".

170 the increasingly cosmopolitan, mundane and secularist thought of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries,
171 precipitated in India from the very first an attempt at religious reformation and led actually to the creation
172 of new religions?... The Brahma Samaj (in Bengal) had in its inception a large cosmopolitan idea-The Arya
173 Samaj in the Punjab, (and other regions) founded itself on a fresh interpretation of the truth of the Veda and
174 an attempt to apply old Vedic principles of life to modern conditions. The movement associated with the great
175 names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda has been a very wide synthesis of past religions motives and spiritual
176 experience topped by a reaffirmation of the old asceticism and monasticism but with new living strands in it and
177 combined with a strong humanitarianism and zeal of missionary expansion?. Islam has recently shared in the
178 general stirring and attempts to return vitally to the original Islamic deals or to strike out fresh developments
179 have preceded or accompanied the awakening of life of the long torpid Musalman mass in India? Especially we
180 see everywhere the tendency towards the return of the spirit upon life; the reassertion of a spiritual living as
181 a foundation of a new life of the nation has been recognizable impulse. Even asceticism and monasticism are
182 rapidly becoming, no longer merely competitive, self-centered or aloof, but missionary, educative, humanitarian."
183 God his own ineffable eternity; she saw that there were ranges of life beyond our life, ranges of mind beyond
184 our present mind and above these she saw the splendors of the spirit? her religions conquer China and Japan
185 and spread westward as far as Palestine and Alexandria, and the figures of the Upanishads and sayings of the
186 Buddhists are reechoed on the lips of Christ."

187 The concept of spiritual unity of all existence broadened the religious outlook of the Indian people and
188 fostered inter religious harmony. The foundation of such universal concord was laid by the Vedic seers in one
189 of their greatest pronouncements-"Truth is one; sages call it variously. Swami Vivekananda has said that this
190 pronouncement of the Vedic Rishi is the Magna Charta of religion. In the Gita (IV-II) Sri Krishna proclaims
191 similarly:

192 2 "Though whatever paths men come to Me, I Receive them 193 through those very paths. All paths, O Arjun, eventually 194 come to me only".

195 Swami Vivekananda memorable words in his opening address at the parliament of Religions at Chicago on
196 11September, 1893, highlight this glorious aspect of the Indian culture:

197 "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We
198 believe not only in universal tolerance, but accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which
199 has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you
200 that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites who came to southern India and took
201 refuge with us in the very year in which this holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud
202 to belong to a religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation."

203 The Iranians, the Greeks, the Scythians, the Arabs, the Mongols and finally the Europeans-all have contributed
204 to the enrichment of Indian culture, one after another. All the major religions of the world have also poured
205 their ideas and visions into the stream of the cultural heritage of India. The perfect synthesis of these powerful
206 cultural currents constitutes the central channel of this culture. The uniqueness of Indian culture lies in the fact
207 that it has created a spiritual milieu on the earth in all stages of its continuity, from the pre-historic age down
208 to the present times. That milieu has been producing, or providing sustenance to, ideal men who have been
209 governing new directions from time to time for the advancement of mankind. In this context it will be apt to
210 recall the following words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, from his monumental work eastern Religions and Western
211 Thoughts': "The Ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the valiant knight of medieval
212 Europe, but the free man of spirit, who has attained inside into the universal source by rigid discipline and
213 practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's
214 pride that she has clung fast to his ideal and produced in very generation and in every part of the country, from
215 the time of the Rishis of the Upanishads and Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi, men who strove successfully
216 to realize this ideal."

217 As Swami Vivekananda said: "India's gift to the world is the light spiritual. The philosophy and spirituality
218 of India is ever ready to flow along the new made channels into the veins of nations of the world." The spiritual
219 dimension of Indian culture stretch to the summit to which human consciousness has reached so far so realizing
220 "the world within", where the glory and splendor of the Supreme One shines. Thus says Sri Aurobindo: "The
221 heavens beyond are great and wonderful, but greater still and more wonderful are heavens within you." Universality
222 and humanism are two of the essential characteristics of Indian culture. It seeks achievement by man of the highest
223 glory and fulfillment of life, the culmination of which is transcendence of him into the next higher species, which
224 Sri Aurobindo has named 'Superman' and 'Sacramental Being'.

225 The pivotal truth of life, around which the entire gamut of the spiritual dimensions of Indian culture revolves,
226 is that man has been endowed with four primal powers: viz. Thought-power or 'Vichra-shakti', power of action or
227 'Karma-shakti' Power of feeling (including sentiments and emotions) or 'Bhava-shakti' and power of consciousness
228 or 'Chit-shakti', If Vichra-shakti remains centered in Maya' (i.e. illusionary conceptions of "I" and "mine") man
229 remains engrossed in Ignorance, of which the offspring are craving, fear and ego. If on the other hand, thought-
230 power is focused on the Divine, man pursues the spiritual path of 'Jnan-Yoga' (the Yoga of Knowledge) which

231 leads him to achievement of the virtues: contentment, fearlessness and reliance on Divine Grace. Man can thus
232 attain Peace-everlasting. Similarly if 'Karma-shakti' is prompted by Maya, man indulges in enjoyment of luxuries,
233 sensual pleasure and opulence, which result in misery. On the other hand if Power of action is prompted by Divine
234 Will, man strives for welfare of all beings, selfless services of the society and other benevolent activities, which
235 lead him to happiness in life.

236 As regards the Power of feeling, if it is utilized for pursuing activities of the lower nature, the result is
237 attachment, desire and memory of desire (vasana), which produces suffering in life. On the other hand if the
238 same 'Bhava-shakti' is turned towards the Divine, man becomes engaged in the spiritual cult of 'Bhakti-Yoga'
239 (the Yoga of devotion), which involves the faculties of surrender, divine love and oneness with all beings, and
240 ultimately lead to the attainment of blissful joy, 'Ananda'. Further, if the Power (or Force) of consciousness is
241 yoked with 'Maya', man becomes victim of the Brute force of which the main characteristics are ambitious, false
242 hook, fraud, conspiracy and tyranny. By dint of these vices man becomes a devil incarnate. If on the other
243 hand, this chit-Shakti is employed in the service of the Divine and for fulfillment of the Divine Will, the Soul force
244 gets awakened in man, bestowing on him the virtues of equanimity, equality, universality and divinity. Man can
245 thus be blessed with the supernal Power of Truth consciousness, which has been termed 'Mind of Light' by Sri
246 Aurobindo, and which is a precursor of Super mind, the insignia of Super mental Beings.

247 Indian culture and religiosity discern three stages in which man's spiritual life progresses. In the first stage,
248 man's religious impulse seeks to find expression in the external form of devotion and worship. He takes recourse
249 to hymns and songs, images and symbols, rituals and pilgrimage, and formal worship in temples, mosques and
250 churches. This stage may be deemed as the kinder garden of spirituality. The second stage is of seeking divinity,
251 not in external objects and acts, but within oneself by the introverted discipline of contemplation, concentration
252 and meditation. True spirituality begins at this stage. Through continued practice of such discipline one can
253 become the lucky recipient of Divine grace and can experience a sort of communion with God. In the third
254 stage, the aspiration achieves the fullness of realization. By dint of identification of his consciousness with the
255 Divine consciousness he lives in the Divine, so to say. He sees God within himself and without, in the field of
256 action. Consciousness that is the basis of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, is yet another dimension. Normally
257 man is conscious only of a small part of himself. Yoga enables him to attain super-consciousness, even Divine
258 Consciousness.

259 The spiritual dimension of Indian life, thought and literature in ancient, medieval and modern times have
260 remained imbedded in the Vedic lore (especially the Upanishads), Mahabharata. "It is due to this original
261 peculiarity, to this indelible spiritual stamp, to this underlying oneness amidst all diversities that if India is not
262 yet single organized political nation, she still survives and is still India."

263 India has been the meeting place of various religions. Religion has been a central preoccupation of the Indian
264 mind. Spirituality is the essence of religion. True spirituality does not reject new light, even materialistic means
265 for human self-development. India can best develop herself and play her destined role in the present arena of
266 universal forces by following the law of her own nature, viz. spirituality. A science-oriented spiritualized culture of
267 India will make room for new fields of research on old psychical sciences, as also spiritual technology and modern
268 material technology. A glaring example of the ancient spiritual technology is the melodious tunes of Shri Krishna's
269 flute, which enchanted and enamored the milk-maids ('Gopis') of Gokul and Vrindavana. Another example is
270 supernal technologies procedure, by dint of which a suitable person, suitable due to one's past 'Karma' and
271 present spiritual Sadhana can become completely identified with the Supreme Being, one's entire consciousness
272 being transformed into Divine Consciousness. An instance of the Vedic age, of such divine transformation, is of
273 Vak, daughter of Maharshi Ambhran, whose eight riks, declaring herself as the Divine Mother, are included in the
274 Rig-Veda. Another instance in modern times is of the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. She has herself stated
275 that Sri Aurobindo had been doing her sadhana and she had been receiving the fruits therefore and that (on
276 culmination of his Sadhana for her) he had pronounced to her one day: "You are She". This spiritual technology,
277 coupled with modern sciences and material technology, is a new dimension of the spirituality of Indian culture,
278 which aims at attainment of 'Para-Vidya' while keeping in view the 'Apara-Vidya'.

279 In such a spiritual-cum scientific culture, even art and poetry will create images of man and Nature which,
280 while satisfying the sum of beauty and ethics, will be conducive to the new light for bringing about a renaissance
281 in India. Therein lies the acumen of the spiritual dimension of Indian culture.

282 The context in which Hindu pluralism has become part of spiritualism is that of the religious plurality of India.
283 At the empirical level, this plurality across religious traditions and within each major religious tradition is a well
284 documented fact. In respect of Hinduism, it has been argued that what needs explanation is the emergence of an
285 allegedly homogeneous 'all-India' Hinduism in the 19th century out of the welter of regional religious traditions,
286 such as Vaishnavism in the west, Shaivism in the south, and Shaktism in the east.

287 If the coalescence of a large variety of religious traditions in the 19th century into (in Romila Thapar's phrase)
288 'syndicated Hinduism' reflected the pressure of an emerging nationalism, the danger that such a homogenized
289 all-India tradition would turn out to be hegemonistic and even intolerant was also recognized, at least implicitly.
290 Vivekananda saw both the former possibility (of an all-India Hinduism) and the latter danger (of intolerance),
291 and strove to promote the one and prevent the other. The method he adopted is of interest in the context of the
292 idea of pluralism.

293 The impact of Ramakrishna's teachings on Vivekananda was comprehensive. To understand the latter's

4 CONCLUSION

294 spiritualistic position, it is imperative that we begin with Ramakrishna, who had by teaching and personal
295 example stressed the importance of realizing the oneness of the true religious quest. He not only affirmed the
296 truth of all available paths of spiritual realization within the Hindu fold, but went further by suspending his Hindu
297 identity for a while and trying to live in the meanwhile as an orthodox Muslim. Ramakrishna's emphasis was on
298 personal experience. In his younger years as a temple priest and religious devotee, he had shown a remarkable
299 openness of mind in respect of the diversity of religious belief and practice, embracing the Vedic-Puranic textual
300 and ritual traditions, Vaishnava and Shakta theology and worship, and the Tantric tradition.

301 With the passage of time, he became more selective and favoured the higher Brahmanical tradition combined
302 with bhakti over other forms of religious faith. Further, he stressed that once a path is chosen; one should
303 be steadfast in pursuing it. Ramakrishna's religious quest drew upon the medieval, pluralist, Brahmanical
304 doctrine of differential striving (adhikara bheda) and, indeed, had deeper roots in classical notions of social
305 status-consistent (svadharmik) and personal nature-consistent (svabhavik) conduct. His familiarity with non-
306 Hindu religious traditions was limited. In short, Ramakrishna was eclectically pluralist, but primarily within the
307 Hindu fold.

308 It was Vivekananda who tried to firmly cross religious boundaries to construct a doctrine of pluralism. His
309 message of religious pluralism and tolerance was addressed to the followers of all faiths, but it was given from a
310 Hindu platform, as it were. One of his most frequently quoted pronouncements (made in 1894 in the USA) reads
311 as follows:

312 "We not only tolerate, but we Hindus accept every religion, praying in the mosque of the Mohammedans,
313 worshipping the fire of the Zoroastrians, and kneeling before the Cross of Christians, knowing that all the
314 religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp
315 and realize the infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of them marking
316 a stage of progress".

317 A close reading of the text, which at first seems to be an excellent statement of the pluralist position, reveals
318 two serious shortcomings. First, it is not exactly an accurate account of the prevailing Hindu practices of the
319 times: some Hindus were like what Vivekananda claimed on their behalf, some were not. The internal diversity
320 within the so-called Hindu fold was and is too great for any such neat and uniformly applicable generalization.

321 Secondly, and more importantly, it is a frankly evolutionist statement in which some religions are higher than
322 others (at different stages of progress). Indeed, Vivekananda's references to the 'lower forms' of Hinduism (which
323 he liked to denigrate as the religion of the kitchen) and non-Hindu religions were not flattering, they were even
324 critical. Aspects of Buddhism and Jainism, notably the agnosticism of the former and the atheism of the latter,
325 were criticized. The Buddha's stress on nirvana was considered a curse. He expressed respect for the Prophet of
326 Islam, but, apart from the social egalitarianism of the Muslims, found little to follow in it. The attitude towards
327 Christianity bordered on the aggressive: he deemed it an inferior religion: 'with all its boasted civilization, [it] is
328 but a collection of little bits of Indian thought? a very patchy imitation [of] our religion. Vedanta, he proclaimed,
329 again and over again, was the universal religion for 'the spiritually advanced' person.

330 Vivekananda's pluralism and his conception of tolerance, it is reasonable to conclude, were hierarchical: it was
331 his considered view that Vedanta comprised all the highest truths of all religions, including those that had not yet
332 been realized anywhere. It is obvious that his ideas of tolerance and harmony, combined with the 'mission' for the
333 conquest of the world by Hindu spirituality, are more inclusive and synthetic than genuinely pluralist. Pluralism
334 requires a transcendental referent in the absence of which either rank relativism will prevail, or hierarchy will
335 rule. Vivekananda clearly believed Vedanta to be the transcendental religion: but surely a valid pluralist logic
336 does not allow us to so elevate one among the many existing religions.

337 Gandhi understood the logic of religious pluralism better than anyone with whose thought I am familiar.
338 (Maulana Azad's pluralism was akin to Vivekananda's, with Islam taking the place of Vedanta). Gandhi
339 maintained that the religion that he considered the source of value was not Hinduism or any other known
340 religion, but one that transcended them all. He did not name it, but one could describe it as a universal, spiritual
341 (non-secular), humanism. He described Hinduism as the 'most tolerant of all religions' because it enables one 'to
342 admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths. Who is to judge such 'goodness'? Gandhi rejected
343 the authority of tradition even when it is regarded as revealed (without human authorship). Ultimately, the only
344 guide is moral reason or the inner voice or 'satisfaction' (atmatushti): one chooses alone, as it were, hoping to
345 be true to one's 'eternal self'. Needless to emphasize, one would have to construct a more generally realizable
346 guideline than the foregoing.

3 II.

4 Conclusion

349 As we have seen above, the meanings of the terms communal and communalism are more or less clear, despite
350 the bitter controversies between supporters and opponents. By contrast, the terms 'secular' and 'secularism' are
351 very hard to define clearly, although they are also equally controversial. In fact, secularism is among the most
352 complex terms in social and political theory. In the western context the main church and state. The separation of
353 religious and political authority marked a major turning point in the social history of the west. This separation
354 was related to the process of "secularization" or the progressive retreat of religion from public life, as it was

355 converted from a mandatory obligation to a voluntary personal practice. Secularization in turn was related to
356 the arrival of modernity and the rise of science and rationality as alternatives to religious ways of understanding
357 the world. In India secularism is largely practiced with tolerance and deep rooted spiritualism. ¹

¹The foundation of Indian Culture(Centenary Vol. 14) PP-418-420 Spiritual Dimensions of Indian Culture

4 CONCLUSION

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